

DRAFT

Governor's Blue Ribbon Water Task Force

Meeting Notes  
January 28-29, 2004  
Santa Fe, NM

Attendees: Brian Burnett, Larry Blair, Frank Chaves, Wayne Cunningham, Louis Gariano, Stan Bulsterbaum, Chuck Dumars, Debbie Hughes, Joe Maestas, G.X. McSherry, Hoyt Pattison, Manuel Trujillo, Sarah Kotchian, Eileen Grevey Hillson, Steve Hernandez, Bob Vocke, Barbara Johnson, Paul Paryski, John D'Antonio, Estevan Lopez, and Kyle Harwood attended the BRWTF meeting. Arthur (Butch) Blazer and Kim Paul (NM State Forestry) attended as guests.

The next meeting of the BRWTF will be February 25-26, 2004 in Albuquerque.

Butch Blazer presented the NM Forest and Watershed Health Planning Process (see <http://eweb.lanl.gov/blueribbon.htm> for presentation). Information can also be found at <http://www.emnrd.state.nm.us/forestry/NMForestHealthPlan/fhpmain.cfm>. The following points were made during the presentation:

- Governor Bill Richardson has called for development and implementation of a statewide plan to address forest and watershed health. Governor Richardson has placed the responsibility for convening and stewarding the Forest and Watershed Health Planning process on the Energy, Minerals and Natural Resources Department, Forestry Division;
- The Forestry Division will steward the development process of a Forest and Watershed Health Plan for the State of New Mexico. The Forest and Watershed Health Plan will promote improved forest and watershed health conditions in New Mexico through increased coordination of effort and resources; be based on the National Fire Plan, the 10-Year Comprehensive Strategy and the Implementation Plan of the Western Governors; and utilize a collaborative process of input and decision-making between the state, federal agencies, tribes, local governments, and the public (policy changes may be needed at the executive level e.g., planning cycles);
- New Mexico's ecosystems are in an unhealthy state due to conditions of over density of fuels, including invasive species and noxious weeds. This unhealthy condition is exacerbated by drought, which results in the unwanted conditions of susceptibility to wildfire and insect infestation, compromised watersheds, and decreasing biodiversity. These conditions are common throughout the West and are of the highest priority, as indicated by the National Fire Plan and the 10-Year Comprehensive Strategy.
- Guiding principles for the Plan include focusing on the underlying problem (not the symptoms) taking the long view (10+ years); planning state-wide (landscape scale) and acting locally (mosaic of landholding); acting aggressively within ecosystem, science-based context; embracing concept of adaptive management; using interagency working group (state, federal, and others e.g., The Nature Conservancy); respecting social and cultural values & traditions; and considering economic vitality (e.g., must utilize small diameter timber).
- In terms of a schedule: public input will be sought during spring/summer 2004; the Plan drafted during fall 2004; and the Plan will be presented to the Governor in December 2004.

BRWTF members made the following observations:

- Tie the NM Forest and Watershed Health Planning Process to the NM State Water Plan, which includes policy/strategies such as "Recognize the relationship between water availability and land-use decisions" and "Promote river riparian and watershed restoration that focuses on protecting the water supply, improving water quality and complying with the federal Endangered Species Act of 1973;"
- The ROI/cost-benefit of water should be considered;
- Invasive species are an issue e.g., saltcedar;

- Monitoring of restoration treatment response (e.g., water yield) is important - anecdotal information is not sufficient and responses are site-specific;
- A number of watershed restoration projects are being conducted around NM;
- Private sector participation is important; and
- Local SWCDs play a key role in getting projects on the ground.

The Task Force discussed priorities with John D'Antonio & Estevan Lopez and the following points were made:

- Active water resources management (e.g., rules & regulations, water masters, metering & measuring, priorities, and communication) will be key in basins with water shortages during the coming irrigation season – this is a top priority and will be controversial;
- Many supplemental well applications have been received – surface waters could be impacted (Texas has expressed concern over such pumping);
- Navajo settlement discussions are continuing;
- Aamodt negotiations are continuing;
- The SWP policy recommendations need to move into the implementation phase;
- OSE/ISC is working with NMED on water quality issues (sharing data, well information and GIS information);
- Domestic well legislation is being considered;
- Mutual domestic issues must be addressed (a soft landing is needed e.g., establishing an initial service area and requiring water rights for expansion);
- Mutual domestic O&M issues must be addressed;
- GW contamination issues must be addressed e.g., mutual domestics;
- Water Trust Board funding priorities/criteria issues exist (intent of original legislation, project doesn't have water rights, NEPA not completed, funding is only for phase 1, there isn't sufficient funding for all projects, project economics [ROI/C-B] not adequately considered, and project not anchored in good science);
- Water users must pay the “true cost of water;”
- A state-wide tax or user fee on water use would need to be fairly distributed;
- Commodification of water is an issue;
- State-wide water priorities must be established (including criteria) to effectively pursue state and federal funding;
- OSE/ISC resource/funding issues need to be addressed;
- Additional funding is needed for the Pecos;
- Water-related legislation will need to be considered in the 2005 session;
- Sustainable conjunctive management is an issue e.g., meeting the RG silvery minnow BO;
- The public needs to better understand the OSE/ISC – education on how it works and what it does;
- NM has 18,000 afy at stake in the southwestern part of the state; and
- Additional OSE efforts with NMED are needed on subdivision rules and regulations.

The BRWTF closed its monthly meeting by reaching consensus on its annual agenda (e.g., priorities, meeting dates, travel, and educational topics). Copies of the Governor's Blue Ribbon Water Task Force Planning Calendar for 2004 will be distributed as soon as they are available. The Calendar will also be posted on <http://eweb.lanl.gov/blueribbon.htm> when it is available. The Task Force meeting notes for calendar year 2003 (June – December) will also be posted at the BRWTF site in addition to these notes and notes from future meetings.